

“I want to get rid of the Indian problem. [...] Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there are no Indian questions, and no Indian Department.”

- Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, 1913-1932

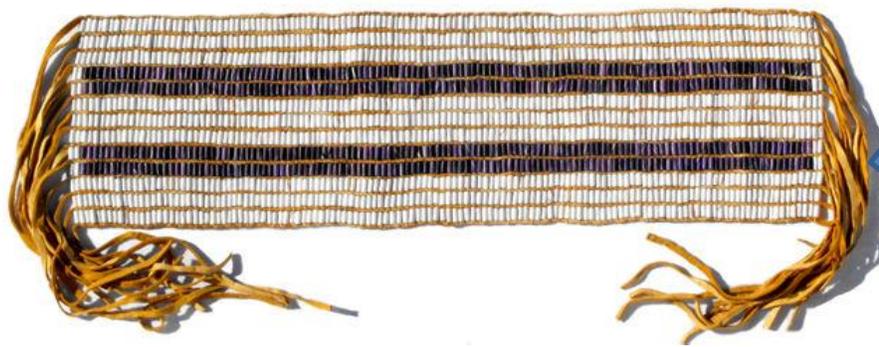
Canada's Residential School System, 1831-1996

What does Duncan Campbell Scott's statement mean?

What does the word “assimilation” mean?

The 1876 *Indian Act* governs “Indians” in Canada – it was this act that created Residential Schools. The Indian Act is still law in Canada, as are the sections that allow for the creation of residential schools.

It was Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, that made attendance of Indian Residential Schools compulsory in 1920.



- The relationship between Canada and First Nations was supposed to follow the vision represented by the 400 year old **Two Path Wampum Belt** (first exchanged between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Dutch Traders) – the idea that First Nations and Europeans would live together on the land, but follow separate paths (and not intervening with each other).
- The Royal Proclamation of 1763, and its ratification by the Western Nations in present-day Ontario by the Treaty of Niagara in 1764, acknowledged the independence and rights of First Nations by the Crown. This proclamation is now protected and affirmed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (and is part of the Canadian constitution).
- The original relationship was honoured until after the War of 1812 (when they were no longer needed as military allies). It is important to note that First Nations were never conquered by the British or Canadian governments.
- Post-War of 1812 the British, and later Canadian Governments, began treating Aboriginal people as **wards of the state** that needed to be **assimilated into Euro-Canadian culture**.
- The Mohawk Institute (called “Mush Hole” by its survivors) of Brantford, Ontario, was established in 1831 becoming the first official residential school in Canada. The residential school system would peak in the 1920-1950s with the last one closing its doors in 1996. Many of these schools were run by churches, but were funded by the Canadian Government.

Excerpt from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

25. The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada including

(a) any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by **the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763**;

What was a Residential School?

The intent of the residential school system was to educate, assimilate, and integrate Aboriginal people into European-Canadian society. In the words of one government official, it was a system designed “to kill the Indian in the child.”

- *Legacy of Hope Foundation and Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2011)*

Often times, the schools only served to kill the child:

- Many schools had a 40-60% death rate for their students
- As late as 1950, over 40% of teaching staff had no professional training
- Children forced to attend Residential Schools were often subjected to sexual abuse, beatings, punishment for speaking Aboriginal languages, forced to eat rotten food (or their own vomit if it made them sick), widespread hunger and thirst, bondage and confinement, and forced labour.

In 2013 stories emerged that a homemade electric chair was used to punish children at St. Anne's Residential School (1904-1976, Fort Albany, Ontario). Accounts also exist of children being subjected to electric shock for the amusement of officials running the school.

Student Inquiry:

Why was it necessary that children be forced to live at the Residential Schools?

Why were children punished for speaking Aboriginal languages?

As of the publication of this handout (February 2013) the Government of Canada admits that over 150,000 Aboriginal children attended residential schools from the 1870s until the 1990s.

There is strong evidence that thousands of those children never returned home.